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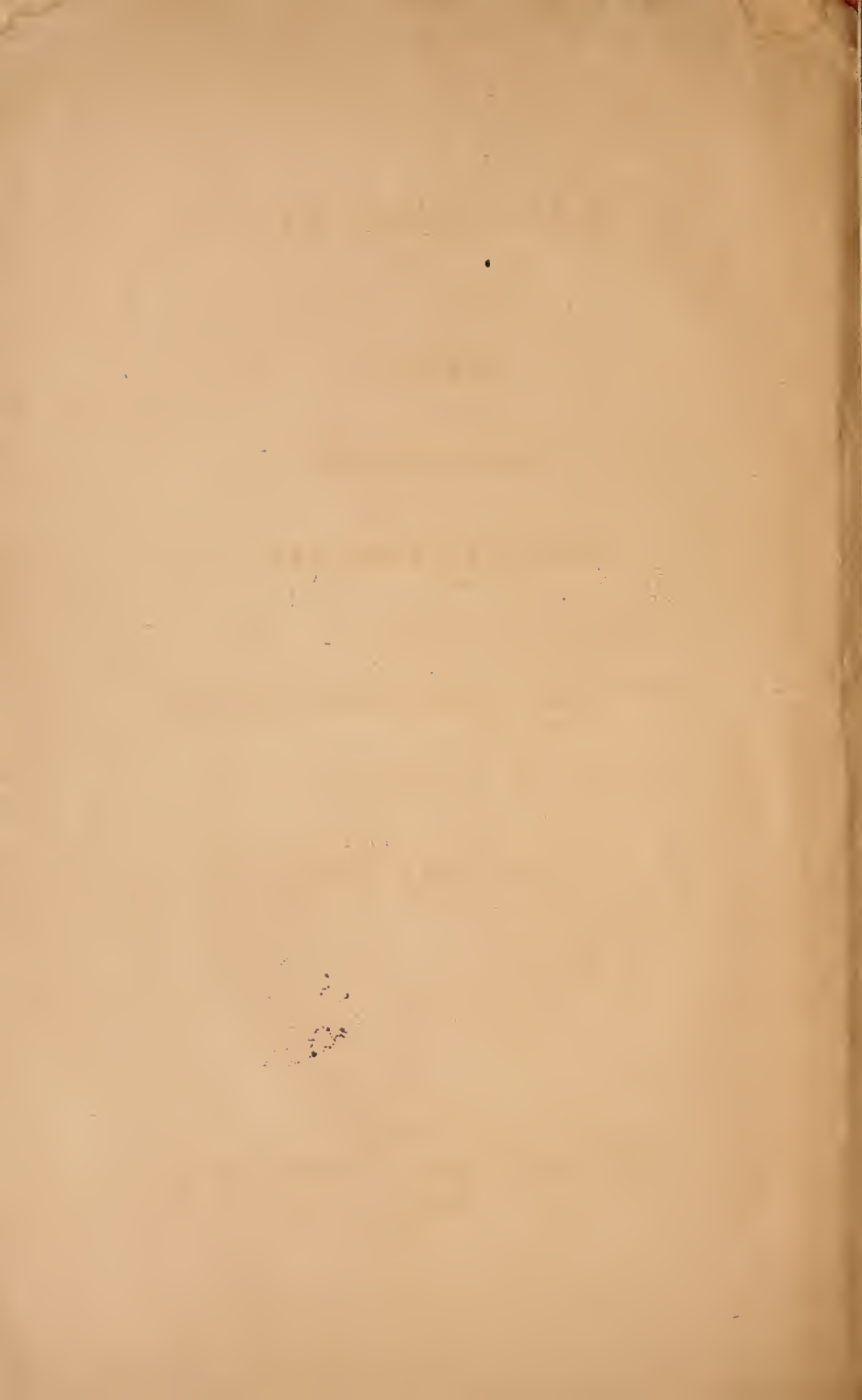
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A Fast implies a Duty.

REV. CHARLES S. PORTER.





*May 10 1870 / OS 5 from Boone
in Bulletin 113889*

A Fast implies a Duty.

SERMON,

Preached April 30, 1863,

NATIONAL FAST DAY,

IN THE

ARCH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

BY

REV. CHARLES S. PORTER.



PHILADELPHIA:

C. SHERMAN, SON & CO., PRINTERS.

1863.

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GEORGE 2615

CORRESPONDENCE.

PHILADELPHIA, April 30, 1863.

REV. CHARLES S. PORTER.

DEAR SIR: We have listened with profound attention, delight, and profit, to your most admirable discourse of this morning, and, constrained by a desire to perpetuate the pleasing memory of your brief and highly instructive ministry in our midst, as well as to benefit our friends and other members of this community, we respectfully ask that you will furnish us a copy for publication.

Yours, with considerations of high Christian esteem,

SAMUEL AGNEW,
HOWELL EVANS,
THOMAS EARP,
WILLIAM COLLINS,
M. MAGEE,
WILLIAM T. SNODGRASS,
EDWIN MOREY,
H. M. LEWIS,
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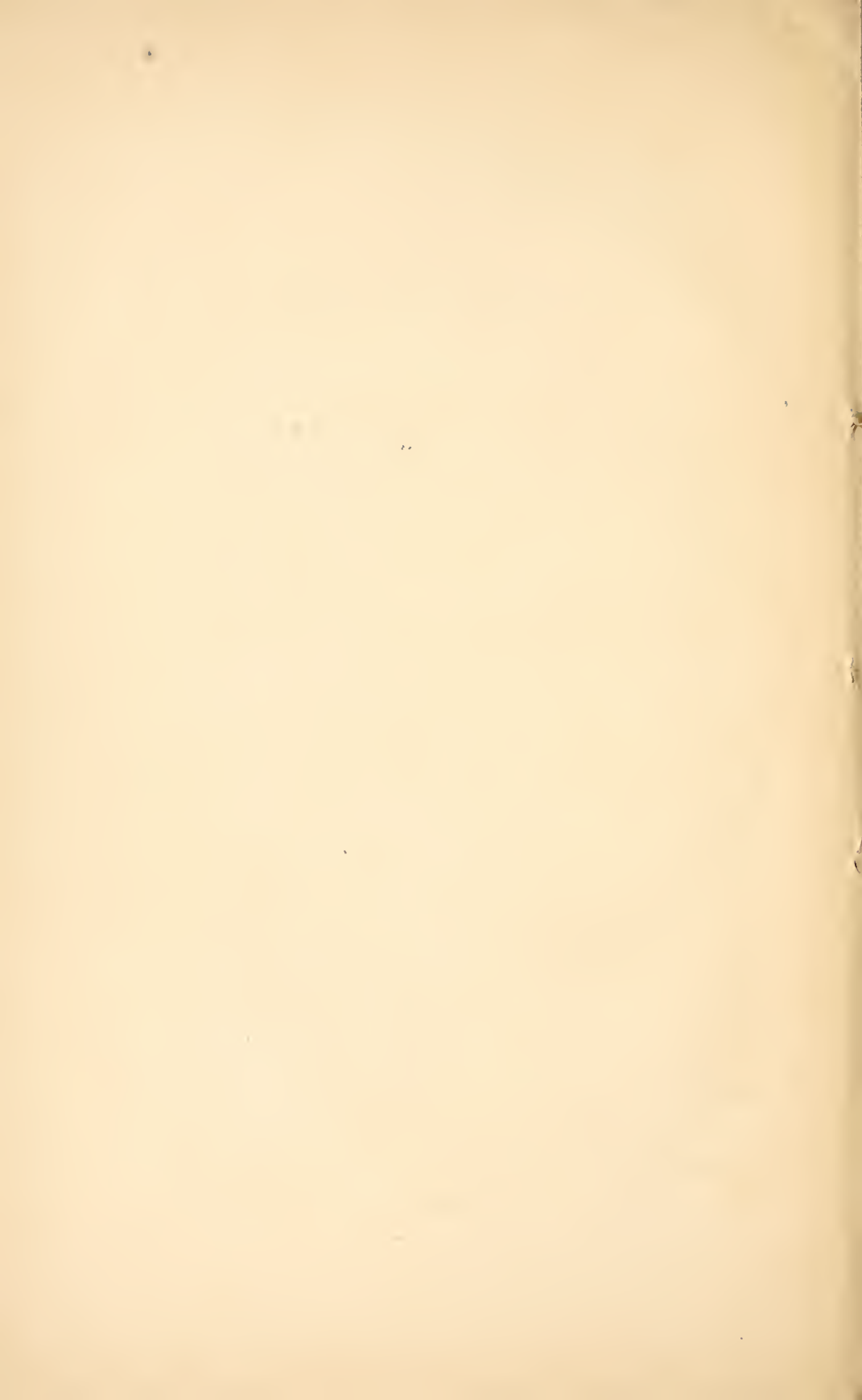
Messrs. AGNEW and others.

GENTLEMEN: Your favor of the 30th ult. has been received. I cheerfully accede to your request. Our country's cause ennobles the humblest effort in her behalf.

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES S. PORTER.

PHILADELPHIA, May 2d, 1863.



DISCOURSE.

1 CHRON. 19 : 13.

“BE OF GOOD COURAGE, AND LET US BEHAVE OURSELVES VALIANTLY FOR OUR PEOPLE, AND FOR THE CITIES OF OUR GOD, AND LET THE LORD DO THAT WHICH IS GOOD IN HIS SIGHT.”

A FAST implies a DUTY. “Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”

The day we now observe, according to appointment by the President of these United States, has been set apart for fasting, humiliation, and prayer. There is a reason for the appointment. The duty specified denotes an exigency. Abstinence from lawful indulgences is required for a reason. Humiliation is demanded for a reason. Prayer is offered for a reason. Each and all are for the same reason or reasons.

A private fast is observed for some reason of a personal nature. A fast by a Church or a State is for some reasons of a local character. A National fast is

for reasons of a National character. These reasons may be those of a physical, civil, or religious nature, according to circumstances, and may all be combined in a given case. The individual has relations to the State, the State to the General Government, and each and all to God.

Moreover, the secular, civil, and moral in individuals or the State, have mutual relations and obligations. Wealth or capital is an element of individual, State, and National power. So also are intelligence, principle, and virtue. The Commonwealth provides for the education of the young, not for their sake only, but also for its own. Mind is its most valuable capital. Mind sanctified is its greatest strength and glory. Every way, the better it is with the individual, the better it is with the State; the better it is with the State, the better it is for private interests. Religious prosperity promotes the civil; civil prosperity is the ally of moral and religious progress. For nations as for individuals, it is life "to fear God and keep His commandments." Hence the individual should be mindful of the interests of the State; the State should care for the individual. All should be reverent towards God, that God may be gracious to all.

In no civil condition is this more true or important than in a republic, where the people make their own laws and elect their own rulers. The government they institute must be a transcript of themselves. If they are high-minded and noble, so will be the government;

if base and corrupt, there will be little else than anarchy.

The present National fast implies, that somehow things are not right with us, and that it is our duty, so far as is possible, to set them right. Then of course

A FAST IMPLIES A DUTY.

What then befits National circumstances? The day and hour, what do these indicate as our duty?

1. To consider our National position and condition in relation to God.

We are to act. Let us do it intelligently. Fasting implies consideration, as we seek therein an end. Humiliation implies consideration, as it is for a reason. Prayer implies consideration, because it is an appeal to God for His mercy and help.

Our history is the legible and wonderful handwriting of God. Our elements of possible success and greatness are His gifts. It becomes us, therefore, to be cognizant of His will, that we may give Him the glory due to His name.

What a history is ours! Its commencement was like the glimmer of a star on the bosom of night; its progress, the beamings of noontide effulgence. Your beautiful and opulent city is a memorable point in the course of our political existence. It embosoms mementoes of our earliest National being. It is itself a noble illustration of our prosperity and greatness. How

could it have become what it is, in population and prosperity, in present and prospective greatness, had not the Nation become by God's favor, a great and prosperous people! And how could we have been the people we are, in men and means for the present awful civil conflict, had we not been favored of Heaven as were never any other people!

God in America's history is the grandest, most important conceivable thought, for the day. It should impress the millions of our land to-day, as if in their hearing the seven thunders of the Apocalypse had uttered their voices. The God of Israel, of the whole earth, has reserved this grand historical handwriting for these last times, and in the annals of the American people. It constitutes one of the loudest calls, one of the mightiest incentives to zeal and faithfulness in duty to ourselves, humanity, and God. How could we worthily observe this day, and not remember something of all this?

For if, what we have been, and are, we owe to the favor of Heaven, it befits us to-day especially to inquire, whether we have been profoundly reverent, or wantonly recreant in respect to God.

According to its just claims, has Divine revelation been generally enthroned in the intelligent convictions of the people? Have we practically confessed our obligations to God for His holy word? How, as the outward expression of our convictions and inward religious life, have we honored Divine institutions? Have

we remembered His Sabbaths, and revered His sanctuary? Have we honored civil government, both as a necessity and a Divine appointment? "The powers that be are ordained of God."

We have rallied in times past for the better observance and perpetuation of the Lord's day, as the grand charter of our civil heritage, the palladium of our liberty and free institutions. We could not have become what we are, we cannot long retain our present position, without it. We were infinitely less guilty before God to-day, had we as a people duly honored His Sabbaths.

We have rallied in times past for the honor of our sanctuaries, and the promotion of public religious worship, as great moral centres of light, truth, order, morality, and religion. It had been better with us, we should have far less occasion for National humiliation, had we made the house of God more a presence, power, and pillar in our social and civil structure.

We have rallied in times past, and we now rally again, with all the energies of a free people, for the defence and protection of civil government against aggressive disloyalty, against the foulest treason ever recorded or unrecorded since man was upon the earth! We should have far less occasion to humble ourselves to-day, had we cherished and honored our Constitution and Laws, as we were bound to do by every consideration of obligation, gratitude, patriotism, and piety.

The temporary hush of human affairs this day is or-

dained, that we may consider this, something at least of all this, with reference to our immediate and remote future.

For here, it is our duty to be strong and of good courage; to stand for the right in the name and strength of God; to assert and maintain a conscious rectitude in his sight. Otherwise we fast in vain. In vain humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. In vain pray that He will lift us up. Our sins, like that of Achan's in the camp of Israel, will effectually bar our present deliverance and future prosperity. The resurrection to-day of a general and deep National conviction that we are right with God, that our hope and help is in Him alone, would be to us in present circumstances like compassing horses of fire and chariots of fire to the cleared vision of Elisha's servant. It would be the voice of God to rulers and people, army and navy: "Be of good cheer; I will help thee, I will strengthen thee by the right hand of my righteousness." It would give light and joy in counsel, union, efficiency and success in action. It would pour the light of seven days upon the portentous darkness of our civil night. It would multiply a thousand fold the forces of victorious war.

The advantage to be secured by this day of humiliation and prayer is with the consciences of the people, that purged of guilt, and with this needful preparation for the reception of His favor, we may have confidence toward God, and be assured of Divine help and favor.

I have dwelt purposely upon this point, our position and condition in relation to God, because it is the appropriate duty of this day, and vital to its proper and successful observance. It is no small matter that we have in hand. We have abundant occasion to be profoundly humble and truly penitent in the sight of God. We have sinned; we have done wickedly. From the days of our fathers we have gone away backward. We have been unmindful of the Rock of our benefits. Our sins testify against us. Our backslidings reprove us. Let us know, therefore, and consider that it is an evil and bitter thing to have thus departed from God. Our condition, like the trump of God, calls us to consider our ways. O! that even now to-day as a nation we might offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put our trust in the Lord! O God! grant us repentance and remission of sins.

2. To stand by our Government. Our first duty is to stand by the throne of God; the next, by the flag of our country. If we are a Christian, we must, we shall be a patriotic people. A true Christian must be, is, the best ruler and subject, citizen and soldier. A voice from the tomb of a clergyman* in your city cries in our ears: "God and my country." Let the ministry, let the church, in every branch, of all denominations, from Maine to California, from the frozen North to the torrid South, echo that cry, "God and my coun-

* Rev. George Duffield, Pastor Pine Street Presbyterian Church; died A. D. 1790.

try!" Let it be the watchword in all our National and State councils. The battle-cry with our armed and marshalled hosts in conflict with treason. Let all the youth in the land, from our primary schools to the walls and halls of our universities, wake in thunder-tones the shout, "God and my country!" Let treason all over the land hear it and tremble. Let the nations hear it, and know for once that we cannot be bought; that we will not be sold; that we cannot be conquered by the forces, or terrified by the thundering batteries of the world! Let all know that under God we have but one aim, purpose, and prayer, to live or die a free, united, and independent republic.

Let it be known, everywhere and forevermore, that we have sworn by the blood of our fathers, and by the blood of our sons, that we will stand by our flag as it streams amid the smoke and shock of battle, or in the glorious sunshine of peace!

Let it be known that the sum and burden of our cradle-hymns, in all generations to come, shall herald the tread of millions yet unborn, with banners inscribed, "God and our country!" They must, they will be taught and inspired to say, "If we forget thee, our country, let our right hands forget their cunning." "If we do not remember thee, let our tongues cleave to the roofs of our mouths."

And why? Because our civil government is an appointment of God. Because it is a child born of the ages in their progressive developments. Because it is

the noblest civil heritage ever bequeathed to men. Because it embodies the germs of peaceful and advantageous revolution in the despotic governments of earth, civil and ecclesiastical, and contains more that concerns humanity and religion than was ever before committed to the keeping of any people under heaven.

By the force of our convictions that we should this day humble ourselves before God, we should and do feel and confess it our duty to stand by our Government in this eventful crisis of our history, cheerfully laying all we have, our treasures, our sons, ourselves, on the altar for her service and defence through all time.

For what should we, with united hearts and voices, supplicate and implore High Heaven to-day, if not for our country, for a united North, for wisdom for our National and State councils, and for success for our arms, till treason dies in its strongholds, or flies the face of intelligent and devout loyalty, as night flies the day!

We must conquer or be conquered. Terms of peace with our foes would embrace the surrender of all we hold most dear, of liberty and prosperity at home, of respect and confidence abroad. We cannot, we will not, consent to be the vassals of a government whose avowed corner-stone is property in man, and from which must ever be ascending cries to Heaven: "How long, O Lord! holy, just and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the face of the earth!"

How could we consent to have the future millions

of this continent walk upon the confines of such a volcano, ever ready to burst forth in wrath and flame, and bury all in just and eternal oblivion?

Better, a thousand times better, to die now, standing by our flag, worthy of ourselves, of our heroic, self-sacrificing ancestry, matchless defenders of our blood-bought heritage.

We are by the force of circumstances put at school, by exigencies that command us, to know ourselves and God, that constrain humiliation and prayer. Our present baptism of blood teaches us to recognize and vindicate a Government that embodies justice as well as mercy; retribution for its enemies no less than protection for its friends; is armed with the thunders of a loyal people against traitors, while it spreads its banners of love over the law-abiding.

It is born of that Government, constructed by a Divine hand that embodies goodness and severity. Justice and judgment are the foundation of that throne, compassed with the rainbow of love.

We have listened to arguments for peace, until we have forgotten that the sword is sometimes needful as a pacificator; a terror to evil-doers; not borne by our National magistracy in vain.

We have listened to pseudo-philanthropy in its tirades against capital punishment, until the public sentiment is wofully demoralized. Many are clamorous for a truce, when the sword of treason is at our throats, and the tramp of invading hosts is to the music of clanking

chains, forged for us and our children. Our most dangerous foes are they of our own household.

A no-government theorist once addressed the late John Quincy Adams upon the advantage, in these days of enlightened progress, of dispensing with the show of law, fines, prison-walls, and the gallows. "Beautiful! beautiful!" replied the venerable statesman, "but," he added, "I am afraid that we are not quite ready for that yet." How ready we are, let the stirring and atrocious events of our times say.

A worthy New England Governor, while foremost in arming and forwarding soldiers for the country's defence, submitted to his Legislature the propriety of abolishing the statute for capital punishment. Wholesale execution of felons is justifiable, but we may not defend the private walks of social life against the murderer! When did the Divine mandate become obsolete? When was it annulled? "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Let us to-day intensify our love of country, by an increase of zeal for the faithful and equitable administration of her laws.

Let us seek the interests of humanity and religion in God's way, by making justice the shield and safeguard of love. Let us be the dupes of no Utopian theories, but as does God, let us magnify and establish law, by making mercy consistent therewith. In God's name, let us be just, that we may be merciful. Let the people be educated in a profound reverence for law, that we may the more effectually promote the grand designs of

the Gospel. Let us to a man stand by the Government in this dark hour of treason's usurpation, that we may the sooner welcome the triumphant and permanent reign of loyalty and peace.

What if we did not frame our Constitution? It constitutes the framework of our Government, under which we have so wonderfully prospered.

What if our votes did not elect the present National Executive? They are nevertheless our rulers by the will of the majority. Our interests and those of our children are embarked in this, our ship of state. If it gallantly rides the waves, successfully buffets the storms, we and they live. If it founders, we all go down together, and with us will perish the brightest hopes of universal man.

What if there are imperfections and infelicities in our republican government and its administration, are we sure there are none elsewhere?

The present is no time for reconstruction and reorganization. The duty of the hour is indicated by its peril. It is no time to reconstruct our forts when the assault of the foe has commenced.

The past is now comparatively of no moment. The future is not an appreciable quantity. Have we the virtue and the valor to say now, by Heaven's help, we have been, and we will be, the freest, noblest Government on the face of the earth. We will defend and transmit our glorious bloodbought heritage to our

children. Humanity and Christianity bid us stand by our Government.

Let us be true men, at all hazards. Let the spirit of '76 preside in the duties and events of the times. Let us set ourselves right with God, that we may successfully assert the right for man.

Let us stand by our Government, or recall our army and navy. Let us stand by our Government, or inscribe upon our soldiers' graves, "Life foolishly sacrificed;" "Died by the just visitation of God, for attempting to storm the citadels of treason, at their country's call." Let us stand by our Government, or ask the monarchies of the world to take us into their keeping as a dependent colony,—the mother country to give us a king!

No! Let us stand by our Flag, and, high above thrones, let us solve the problem, "Have a free and intelligent people the capacity and right to govern themselves, and by the inherent force of principle and valor, ride upon the high places of the earth?" My hope is, that our mission of light and love to the nations of the earth is but just begun. To my vision, there seems just before us a glorious future,—the dawn of the promised millennial day.

3. To withstand and forestall the demoralizing influences of war. Depraved human nature is a mighty magazine of combustible and explosive material, which the torch of the incendiary lights with issues, like

“the crack of doom!” Civil and moral restraints constitute our only safeguard against an outbreak that shall make and leave society a heap of ruins.

War unchains and infuriates the worst passions of our natures. Lust becomes rampant. Violence enacts and multiplies enormities. We see, in the wild commotion that lifts the mask, or blows aside the flimsy covering, what man is. So the agitated sea confesses what, in a calm, lay hid in tranquil depths below.

The charge of corruption rings out on every hand. Offices are bought and sold. Official favors are granted for a consideration. Elections hinge upon some hobby as a party watchword, and zeal is fired by anticipation of the “spoils.” Patronage is the driving-wheel of political machinery. Still we are essentially no more corrupt than we have been. Human nature is an old institution. War, more than anything else, unearths the monster.

Generals organize and handle armies with an eye to the White House. Why? A nation at war must have a military chieftain at the helm!

Contractors and commissioners for army supplies conspire to defraud the Government and enrich themselves. The soldier and sailor serve for a pittance, and that not always promptly paid. He is sometimes robbed of the gifts of friends, or buys for the relief of his necessities, at a high price, what love had before forwarded as a memento of affection from home.

And in our domestic troubles, monarchies, jealous of

our growing numbers and power, growl at us from amid palaces, towers, and battlements. Alas, for us! It is the hour and power of darkness. It is the time of our visitation,—a revelation-day of Almighty God, the mirror in which we may see ourselves as He sees us!

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not even of your lusts, that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not. Ye kill, and desire to have, but cannot obtain.”

War helps our conceptions of the true character of man. We see what enemies, by wicked works, God loved, and sent his Son to succor and to save. That the Nimrods, Ahabs, Judases and Jezebels of other days left a numerous posterity.

We are not surprised at the discovery. We knew the Devil was not dead,—is not without children now, more than in the time of Christ. We know that war gives large dividends to the capital of hell. That chaplains, Christian Commissions, and good men in the army, cannot wholly, but only partially save the land from the immoralities of the camp; and a flood-tide of iniquity will soon be upon us, as one of its dire results.

What then? Shall we despond? Shall we despair? *Never!* By the help of God, *NEVER!* Was not the Gospel constructed in the wisdom of God, to cope with this enginery of sin and hell? Has it not slain a vast amount of enmity to God and man? Is it not still mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong-

holds? Is not the promised effusion of the Spirit for these last days?

What, then, is our duty in the midst of these present and prospective unsightly and awful developments? What? if not to engage in a war of the Lord at home, with heavenly armor and corresponding zeal, go forth to meet these giant progenies.

The ministry must be armed with Heaven's batteries of truth and love, and ply them with the utmost force of position and utterance. The Church must arouse herself from her slumbers and take the field,—spend her strength upon the enemy, and not in foolish and hurtful raids upon friends. Like Gideon's immortal three hundred in the presence of invading hosts, dash their pitchers, uncover their masked lights, lift up the voice together, and herald the on-coming, conquering forces of Heaven. Let her thus become a mighty consolidation of union and strength, that she may "name her walls salvation and her gates praise."

Our families must be intrenched and fortified with the truth of God. The youth of our land be more generally gathered and vigorously trained in our Sabbath-schools. Let the Christian press no longer cater to ignorance, indolence, and effeminacy; address the reason and conscience *more*, imagination and self-complacency *less*.

We arm ourselves with moonbeams for this war in vain. Human nature will not succumb to, or be improved by such appliances.

See how men drive their earthly schemes! How energetic and tireless! How lavish we are of men and treasures for the army! Shall we, then, make no investment for the skies, and beyond the fires of the great burning day? Shall we not fight the good fight of faith in hope of victor palms and crowns above?

We wisely, nobly purpose to defend and extend civil freedom by braving the turmoil, smoke, and carnage of war. Shall we not also defend and extend morality and religion at any needful sacrifice of treasure and life, in joyful anticipation of a heavenly inheritance,—a crown of life that fadeth not away?

How prodigal in civil war! How parsimonious in the battles of the Lord! We build and embellish the sepulchres of the dead, and disregard the cry of the living, "No man cares for my soul!"

Oh, had we, in times past, fought as we should the battles of peace, we should have been spared this sea of blood! More of God's truth at home, with less of lies; more of God's truth at the South, with less of crimination, hatred, and withdrawal of sympathy and aid, would have held us back from this fratricidal strife.

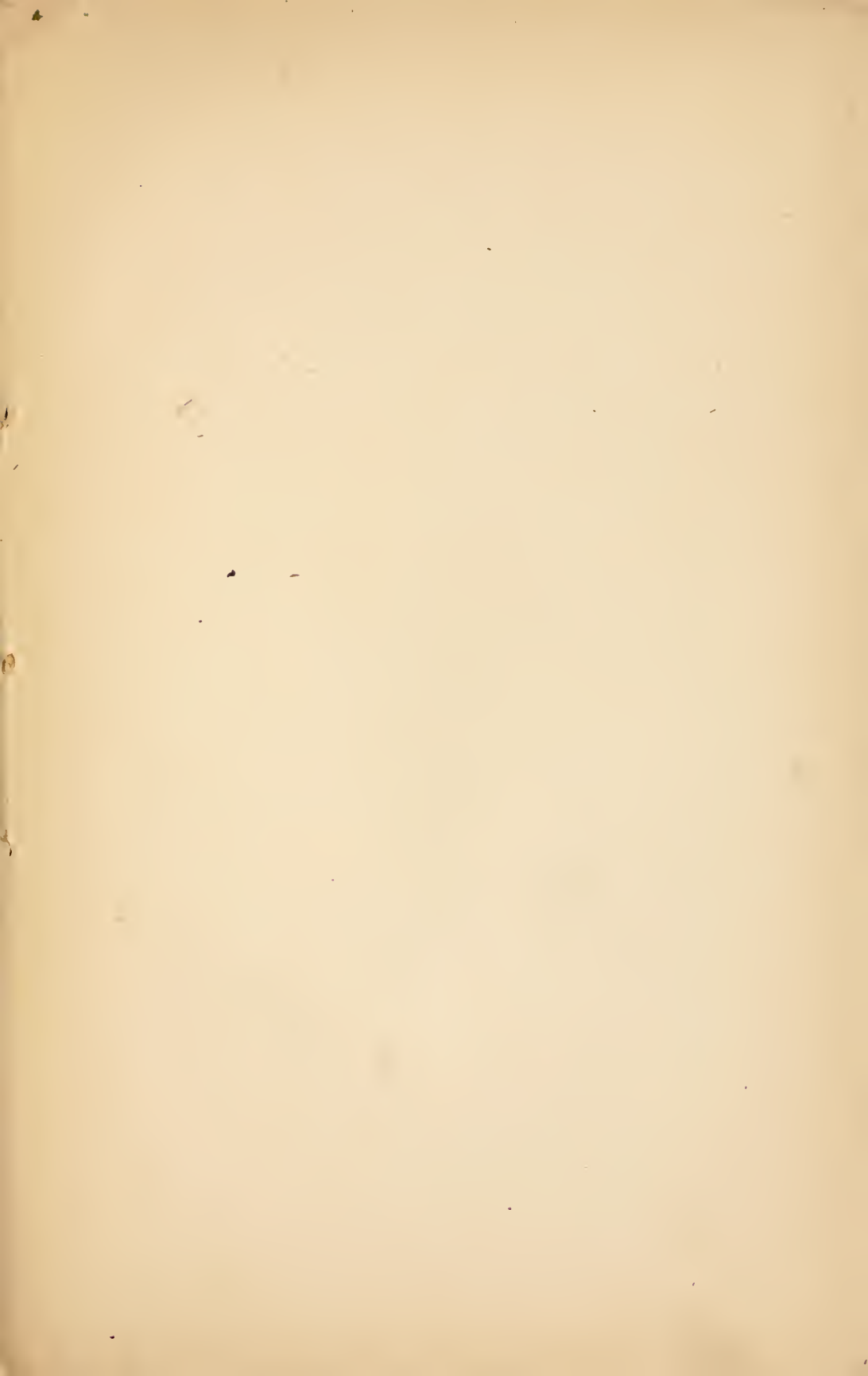
Had we deemed the South, from whence has come this whirlwind, a field white for spiritual harvests, as well as a market for our manufactures, we should have made less bad debts, and better investments for heaven.

The days of compromise with our foes have long since passed. Let us now annul our covenant with

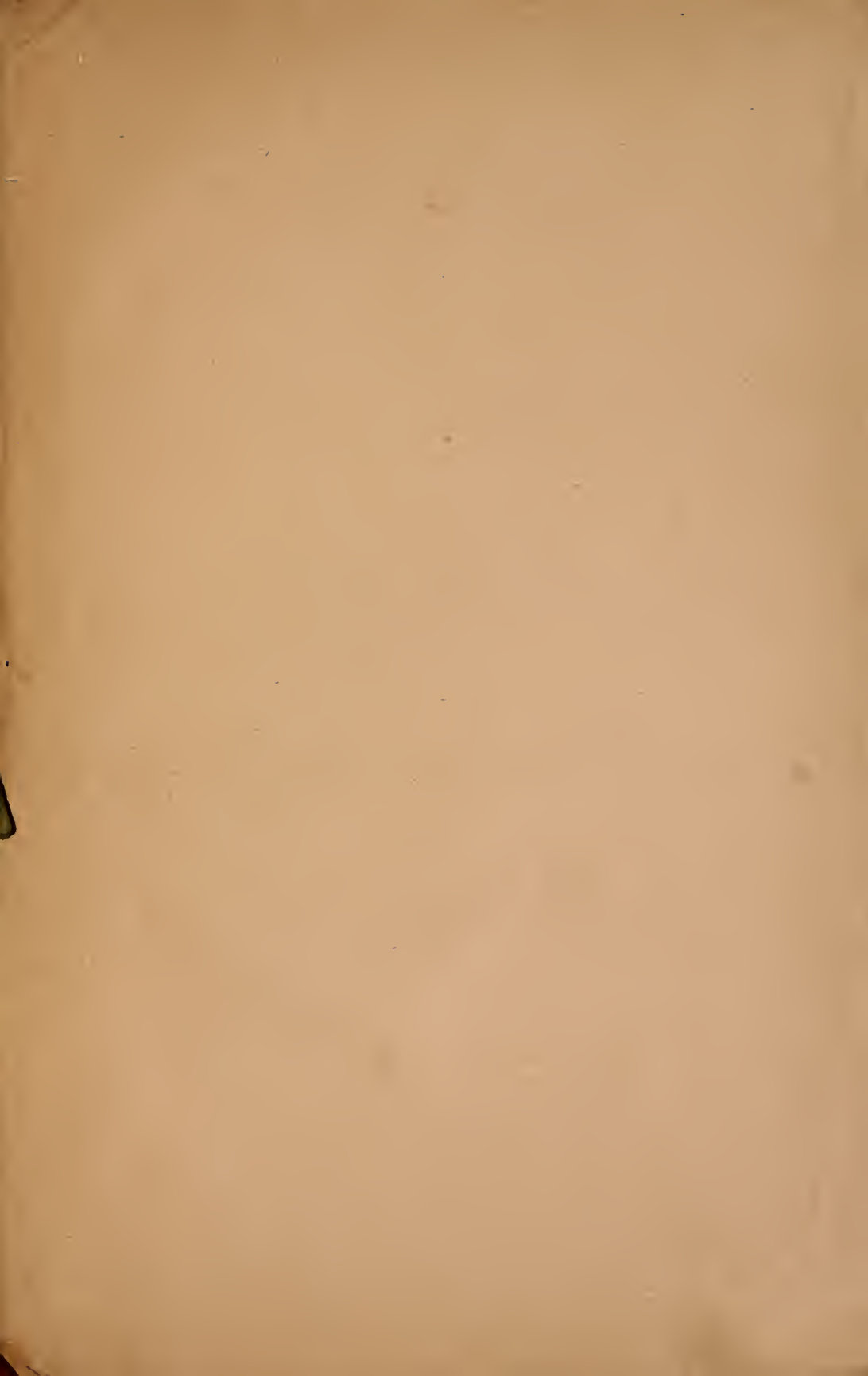
death, our agreement with hell, and side with God and holiness. Our present trials, perils, and necessities persuade us to do this. Our day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, like the trump of God, summons us to this. Hope of help from trouble demands this.

“Let us be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God, and let the Lord do that which is good in his sight.”

Such, in part, is the duty implied by our National fast. As we are sincere and earnest in the one, we shall be faithful and zealous in the other. God is both witness and judge. Amen.







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